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AUTHOR Brewster, Kingman, Jr.
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ABSTRACT

At the root of student unrest are two basic factors: (1) the "involuntary campus," and (2) the "manipulated society." Many students attend a university not because they want to, but because of parental pressure, to avoid the draft, to get the right job, or to satisfy the notion that in order to be really accomplished it is necessary to have a degree - preferably a doctorate. There is strong pressure on the student to finish college in four years, or to continue immediately with graduate study. For a healthier voluntary campus atmosphere, prestigious employers could arrange with universities to have talented seniors return to the campus anytime within ten years after graduation. The "manipulated society" refers to a deeply rooted malaise in this country, which traditionally has been a haven for those with economic, political or opinion intiatives. This country now seems more manipulated than free, more closed than open. Economic power is concentrated in the hands of a few, as is the opinion industry of national networks and the strong newspapers. The political market is now increasingly dominated by the concentration of self-perpetuating power. To regain an open society, it is essential that these power centers be opened so that all will have a chance to participate. (AF)

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Michigan State University, East Lansing, Mich.
Fall Commencement, December 6, 1969
Address of Kingman Brewster, Jr., President of Yale University

# [The Closing Society]

I want to talk about two things which I think are among the roots of what is politely called campus "tension", or even more delicately called student "unrest."

The first thing has to do with the circumstance of most colleges - I would call it the "involuntary campus."

The second thing has to do with the circumstance of the nation - I would call it the "manipulated society."

If we do not succeed in achieving a campus which is more voluntary than most of ours now are; if we do not restore a widespread faith in the openness of society, then I think our present troubles will seem as nothing compared to what lies ahead. Optimism is one of the requirements of my calling, however, so I would also like to share with you some wishful thoughts about how we might achieve both a more voluntary campus and a more open society.

My elders and betters, my peers and contemporaries are backed to the wall, then driven up the wall, eventually driven up and over it, by students who are often fundamentally anti-intellectual; who are impatient with learning and research; who think there are social ends other than the advancement of learning which a university should serve; and who see no reason why the majority vote of students should not dictate what those ends are and how they should be pursued.

It was an SDS member at Berkeley who first woke me up to the fact that the reason so many seek to divert the university from its primary mission is because so many are there involuntarily, not because they want to be there.

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"Like don't give me that stuff about how I'm here to learn," he said, "I'm here because I have to be; so if I have to be here against my will, why shouldn't I have a say in running the place."

He might have been talking about the draft. He might have been referring to parental insistence that he go to college. He might have meant that the university seems to be an indispensable hiring-hall for those who would escape the menial levels of drudgery.

Whatever he meant it was clear that his determination to take the place over was motivated in large part by the sense that he was trapped in it by forces beyond his own choice or control. On the whole, this reaction is not without noble precedent. It is in areas where freedom of choice, including freedom to escape, is not possible that we are most insistent that self-determination shall be gained collectively, by democratic participation or representation.

I am not at all sure I favor the all-volunteer army, but I am very sure I do favor the all-volunteer campus. It is not primarily because I'm sorry for the undisciplined student who finds himself unable to buckle down and make the most of his good fortune. It is, rather, because a university, too many of whose members feel captive, is corrupted, distracted, and fouled for all its members. Higher learning cannot work if it is involuntary. And the judgments which universities and their faculties must make about degrees and about appointments cannot be made by a process which allows the judged to outvote their judges.

The most dramatic distortion of the motivation for going to college is, of course; the result of the draft. I can no longer blame a young man for accepting the draft sanctuary of academia as an alternative to the risk of killing and dying in a war nobody is enthusiastic about. You might as well blame a man of wealth for buying municipal bonds. But I can blame a conscription system which

permits the obligation of service to depend on whether a boy is on campus or off at the age of nineteen. No campus can be all-voluntary as long as the draft herds thousands into the academic corral in the hope that by the time they graduate the dreadful war will be over.

But even if the shadow of the draft in an unpopular war were lifted, there would be powerfully coercive pressures driving young men and women to universities in a hang-dog, involuntary mood. Parents and schools are likely to think that somehow, something is wrong with the son or the daughter who doesn't want to go right on to college after high school, or who doesn't want to go through college in four consecutive years. Now some of this is economic - the desire to get them off the family's back, to put it bluntly. But most of it is pure conformity to the pace of the conventional escalators or success. Parental concern is whetted, of course, by the fear that once off the escalator the son or daughter might never get back on. The freadful word "drop-out" - quite appropriately pejorative at the elementary and high school level - has been allowed to frustrate sensible plans for splicing academic and non-academic experience. It makes it harder to think of taking a year off for work or social action involvement between school and college, or in the middle of college.

It is the excessive lock-step, continuity of learning, from age five to twenty-five, which stultifies the motivation of some of the most gifted students. Easier escape and easier re-entry would do much to make the campus a voluntary community once again.

Then there is the growing notion that to be really accomplished it is necessary to have an advanced degree, preferably a doctorate. (Here I speak with diffidence, for all my doctorates are literally as well as figuratively "unearned.") "Credentialitis" is one of the principal diseases which afflicts

university life.

Here I do place the blame on the employers, professional, semi-professional, business, financial, and governmental. Its most absurd extreme is the decision of the great Harvard Law School to follow the lesser sheepskins and allow me to convert my LL.B. to a Doctorate by mail application and the payment of an appropriate fee! No doubt there are corporations, state governments as well as the federal government which will automatically reward this "higher degree" with a higher job-rating, and several thousand dollars of higher salary. The package, not the product, seems to be what counts.

Nothing would be healthier for the voluntary campus atmosphere than for prestigious employers to make a deal with universities whereby a talented college senior could count on returning to the campus when he needed it, any time within ten years after graduation. Then he could go to work right after college. He could be confident that if more specialized training would help his advancement, his employer would be able to send him back to study. Even better, he would know that if he decided he did not like the field he was working in, he could go back to the university and equip himself for another specialty or profession.

A person should not be made to feel that he must get all his formal education in the first twenty odd years of his life. Nor should he be made to feel that once he picks a line of work he has forever forfeited a chance to change his mind and tool up for some other career.

There must be more chance to recycle back through the university, if we are to retain the sense of continuous freedom of career choice. If everyone must choose his rut, and feel that by graduation he is beyond the point of no return, then we will have lost much of that sense of freedom which is essential to the voluntary society. The university may be our best hope of retaining this sense of

having a chance for a second start.

It would be far better for the campus atmosphere and the academic ethic if the university were a resource for men and women of all ages, if, but only if, they really want what it has to offer.

Far better to have the second starter, if he is a self-starter, than to have students carried through by a tide of career conformity, propelled by someone else's expectation rather than by their own motivation. Of course this ideal can never be completely achieved, but I submit that the approach to the ideal of the all-volunteer campus is worthy of much more attention, energy, and ingenuity than it has received.

My second concern, what I would call the "manipulated society" is, of course, a larger order. It may point to a more deeply-rooted malaise.

The open society presupposed widely dispersed centers of initiative - economic initiative, political initiative, opinion initiative. No one was supposed to be wholly trapped in any political community, or dependent upon a single political organization. No one was supposed to be subject to just one source of news or confined to a single point of view.

Of course, there were always pockets of economic power and political power and opinion power which were hard to escape. The genius of American society, however, was the widespread confidence that by and large the person with a new and better idea could break in or break out. The idea might be a way of meeting some economic need; a way of satisfying a political aspiration; or a way of thinking about things.

Best of all was a sense that you could move on and start again. If you were persecuted by the crown you moved to the colonies. If you were hemmed in by the aristocratic system of the east coast, you moved west. There was what Margaret Mead called in her wartime book about American values,

"And Keep Your Powder Dry", a widespread sense that success depended more on effort than it did on inherited status or political favor.

The impertinence of a Mr. Dooley, a Mark Twain, a Will Rogers was perhaps the best expression of a society of independent, self-determined men, who relied more on rivalry tempered mutual good humor and good will than on the patronage or the patrimony of a paternalistic government.

Indeed abusive government was the enemy. There was a healthy sense that the greater the power, the greater the chance of its abuse. Efficiency, speed, order were all sacrificed to assure the citizens' protection against abusive authority or corrupt power. Fairness was more important than dispatch.

That fight, the fight for fairness, for the presumption of innocence, for the risk of freedom of unpopular thought and expression is still very much our fight.

But I have confidence in the ability of the citizenry to call a halt to public persecution. Even if our government officials do become afraid of freedom, I think that in the country as a whole and among the younger citizenry in particular there is a zest for the contest of free men and free ideas.

Our problem is more subtle. It is not the problem of a latter day George the Third; it is not the fear of official regimentation, so much as it is a sense that the society is more manipulated than it is free; more closed than it is open.

In economic terms it speaks of the concentration of economic power. Affluence may be one dividend of mass production and huge combinations of capital; but the loss of choice is another result. And the loss of choice is not just an economic concern. It means that more suppliers, more dealers become dependent satellites of fewer and fewer large conglomerates. The ultimate escape from

the private government of the large corporation used to be your ability to take your trade elsewhere - now often there are no elsewheres. Frequently rivalry has shifted from useful lowering of cost and price to larger and larger sales expenses, inflating the role of the huckster. Madison Avenue, not Wall Street, has become the control headquarters.

In terms of the opinion industry and the so-called market place of ideas, concentration of power has to some extent been ordained by a technology which requires the rationing of limited air waves. It has been compounded, though, by the privilege of private restrictive networking in the broadcast media, and compounded by fantastic labor costs and resistance to labor saving devices in the printed media.

The survival of the strongest if not the fittest newspapers has produced local and regional journalistic monopolies. The technology of news gathering and the cost of efficient nationwide and international magazine distribution has left little room for significant new entrants in national weekly journalism.

From Newport palace to Appalachian hovel, into every parlor come the three networks; each competing for the same advertisers, with roughly the same estimate of what the market most wants. All are equally fearful of offending either the private or the public powers that be. Each strives for the dramatic and the sensational splash, even if it means artificially creating a pot party at Northwestern in order to film it as a sample of student life; or hiring students to race motorcycles across the Berkeley Campus in order to create the desired atmosphere of student mayhem.

So we come to politics, the last best hope of the citizen for control of the public destiny. This market too is increasingly dominated by the concentration of self-perpetuating power. Running for office (or being run for

office) has become a millionaire's game as the cost of campaigning has soared to unbelievable heights. John Lindsay spent more than two million reported dollars to run for Mayor of New York City! No one can even think of running for Senator in a major state, let alone for President of the United States, unless he can command millions for television time.

Now this is not a saga of wicked men. Those who fashion mergers are not wicked. Those who preside over, or serve, the networks are not wicked. Those who run for office or who finance candidates are not wicked. Each of them is simply making the most of the opportunity which modern technology and management systems offer for the success of his stockholders, his views, his partisan organization.

The wickedness is that we do nothing about the undue concentration of power. Like Mr. Agnew we blame the men and do nothing about the system which makes their increasingly exclusive power possible. Yet if we do nothing ours will soon become a closed, manipulated society; no longer an open, free one.

The concentration of economic power, opinion power, and political power creates a sort of closed loop. Politicians must raise money from corporations in order to pay the networks the enormous cost of television time. Corporate advertisers call the network tune. And the networks must curry favor with the successful politicians to assure their franchise.

The open society seems to be closing - not by conspiracy, but by the mutual dependence of a very small group of advertisers, media, and politicans.

It is increasingly difficult to keep alive a burning faith in the competition of ideas in the free market place, the competition of candidates in the free ballot box; or the competition of producers guided by Adam Smith's unseen hand of Providence.

I am convinced that there are ways to pry open the closing society if only we would put our minds and energies to it.

Legal requirements and tax incentives for economic deconcentration are not beyond our capacity. If business wants to remain free to manage itself it should realize that the burden of persuasion should be put on bigness, especially bigness by merger. Perhaps the presumption against bigness was best put by Louis Brandeis when he was an attorney prosecuting the railroads, when he remarked to the judge: "Your honor, if the good Lord meant us to have such large organizations he would have given us the brains to run them."

Politics need not be the monopoly of the rich or their hirelings, if only we would insist that those who enjoy the public franchise of television and radio waves shall give candidates ample prime time at nominal cost during campaigns. Perhaps we could require a candidate's deposit for this privilege refundable if he achieved a decent minimum of votes, much as the British do for the privilege of a place on the ballot.

The opinion industry itself could be loosened up by the introduction of variety of ownership interest. We could reverse the trend toward self-perpetuation by defeating the Pastore Bill which would make it harder than ever for a newcomer to compete for a franchise. And we should arouse ourselves against the current efforts to exempt the joinder of newspapers from the antitrust laws. If we would reopen the closed society we should absolutely prevent the merger or joint ownership of different media. Why should a town be locked into a jointly owned newspaper and television station? We should also consider requiring advertisers or commercial networks to contribute a small percentage of their outlays or revenues to the financing of non-profit community and educational television.

There are ways of breaking open the closed loop of corporate, opinion-making, and political power. The closing society could be reopened. The ancient faith in the free competition of ideas and interests and viewpoints could be revived. But it will happen if, and only if, we make it our cause.

If there appears to be no escape from this loop of social control, however; if there seems no easy way to break into the power circle, it is inevitable that "confrontation" and "pressure" should increasingly become the instruments of those who are frustrated.

If the system is not convincingly open to newcomers and is not open to change, our plea to the radicals to "work through the system" will not get very far.

The flame of the ancient faith burns bright in Michigan. Your Acting President has long been a militant champion of the dispersion of economic power; your Governor has long been a progressive Republican, skeptical of concentrated power - whether concentrated in Washington, in big finance, or big labor. Your Senior Senator, Phil Hart, is almost an Horatius at the bridge in seeking to hold back the avalanche of mergers and take-overs. But the flame will not burn long if you and your generation do not make the spirit of the bill of rights and the spirit of the antitrust laws your cause and give the openness of society a higher priority than affluence or technological efficiency.

It is up to you to reopen the closing society so that we may retain a system which is convincingly open to everyone to work through.

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